

how to shoot a rubber gun

Once upon a time, in Montreal, there was a group of people who carved out their own physical and psychological space, and then made films about it all. *Montreal Main* began the story, and *The Rubber Gun* completes it. The people have split, the curtain has come down. And Montreal is the poorer for it.

by P.M. Massé-Connolly



Allan Bozo Moyle, director of *The Rubber Gun*, making a point.

photo: Lois Seigel

I remember one night Bozo (Allan Moyle) telling about the traumas of choosing a title for a film. At one point there was a mural stretched half-way across his loft scribbled with possible titles. I had always assumed **The Rubber Gun** got its name the night Pam Holmes and Pammy Marchant were supposed to meet Peter Brawley and Pierre Robert for a night of dancing at the limelight (Stanley St. below St. Catherine). When Marchant and Holmes got there, the bouncer told them there were no girls allowed in that night.

Highly insulted as only Holmes and Marchant can be insulted, they "held up" the bouncer, and walked into the club, the only two women there. Of course, it was not a *real* gun, but the bouncer didn't know that and called the police. By further "holding up" a few other people they all managed to leave before the *law* arrived.

Then they made their way to the now defunct Orient Express (McKay St. below Sherbrooke). In the Orient that night was a man who owed Pierre Robert money, but the debt had been forgotten a long time ago. Pierre sat down next to him, and saying a casual "Hi", he stuck the gun into his old friend's ribs. No one has ever forgotten the look on that man's face.

I don't know if that's how the film got its name but the rest of the story is true.

Then there was the Christmas, prior to the release of **Montreal Main** when Brawley called me up to a very *private* little Christmas party being held at a rather opulent Sherbrooke Street address. Everyone there was dressed opulently, and at midnight, three maids served an opulent Christmas dinner in the opulent dining room.

Everyone was waiting for Stephen Lack to arrive. When he made his entrance, as only Mr. Lack can make an entrance, he was wearing jeans, his hair was an opulent mess, and his shirt was hanging out from under his sweater.

I know you've all been dying for me to get here so you can get stoned, but really, I don't have anything.

Then he escorted a select group into an opulent bathroom, where the temperature dropped considerably.

Then there was a taxi ride to Lack's now defunct loft (Coloniale & Prince Arthur), where the temperature continued to drop. To be fair, though, part of this was due to the fact that Lack's loft had one outstanding feature; it wasn't heated, something you're apt to notice during the Christmas season if you live in Montreal. And now, to Lack's amusement, he was taking pictures of us consuming our after dinner anesthetic. In the chaos I wondered how he and his crew were going to pull off a feature film.

I love John Hofsess' line describing **Montreal Main** as "a plucky dance in the face of adversity"... he wasn't kidding; no heat is adverse to me.

When **Montreal Main** opened at the Elysée (Milton & Clark) to a standing-room-only crowd, I was stunned. In spite of the odds – and they seemed endless – they had done it. The cast, and their friends stayed in the lobby during most of the films, checking now and then, to see which lines had gotten the laughs. Stephen commented that "the reviews will be great, but who were those rude people out in the lobby who made so much noise?", which was when one of the Bronfman's walked out of the film.

P.M. Massé-Connolly took part, and wrote things down, and photographed it all. She also recently made her acting début in Lois Seigel's Recipe to Cook a Clown.

Within Mr. Bronfman's earshot, Stephen commented that "there goes a man with *silver* hubcaps on his car..."

After the screening, 500 people made their way down to The Silver steamed hotdog stand (lower St. Lawrence Blvd.) where the last scene in the film had been shot. There were free hotdogs and cokes to celebrate this first post-premiere party, and Marchant managed to hustle enough quarters to take 4 for 25's of almost everyone there, all the time the regulars on the Main wondering why their hotdog stand was so packed, and on a Wednesday night. Even the police stopped, curious to see what the commotion was about.

Perhaps the biggest surprise, though, was when not only the English press decided it loved the film, but the French press ran page after page of rave reviews, and ran huge shots of Johnny Sutherland.

photo: P. M. Massé-Connolly



Lewis Furey (right) at an opening of Lack's pictures at Vehicule Art.

That same strange thing happened when **L'Ange et la femme** (a wonderfully prurient film by Gilles Carle, starring Carole Laure and Lewis Furey who scored both that film and **The Rubber Gun**) had its premiere. It was by invitation only, which meant that the bulk of the audience was French, and Lack, who had five minutes in the film, and the only English lines, received unanimous and spontaneous applause after his lines. Stunned again, I looked at Lack who looked like a cynical five-year-old on Christmas morning who just got more than he had asked for.

A few years ago I had walked into the Rainbow Bar & Grill (Stanley St. above St. Catherine), and asked the bartender if anyone good was playing that night.

He told me, yes, there was this new guy, Lewis Furey, and he was great, I shouldn't miss him. He couldn't really describe his music but it was something well worth catching.

The bartender was right, and I went back every night, and so did Lack who would lie on the floor, and take roll after roll of film. Soon, Lack was taking roll after roll of film at the Hotel Nelson (Place Jacques Cartier), while Lewis played to ovation after ovation, charming everyone, strolling through the audience with his viola and singing "Louise". Then one night Ahmet Ertegun was in the audience, signed Lewis up to a record contract, and he was off to Hollywood.

Lack later did both of his album jackets, and co-wrote "Top Ten Sexes" with him on the second album, "The Humours of Lewis Furey".



Peter Brawley, twice busted.

photo: P. M. Massé-Connolly

March 1974; Brawley had just returned from a three-month stay in Miami to begin work on *The Rubber Gun*,... a project that was ostensibly Bozo's and Stephen's while Frank Vitale pursued commercial filmmaking. Frank, though, ended up shooting most of *The Rubber Gun*, along with Jim Lawrence, a master still photographer as well, who introduced Lack to cibachrome, which was much in evidence at his last one-man show (at Vehicule).

The first audio takes were supposed to take place on a Sunday afternoon at Lack's loft, but a storm made things almost impossible. Brawley was horrified; "I knew it, I knew it, as soon as I get back it snows, I never should have come back, I could have stayed you know, I knew it, I knew it..."

I was allowed to sit in on the first audio takes for the film; Bozo just suggested what the scene might be about and the rest was improvised. Most of the dialogue took place between Brawley and Holmes, and centered around turkey sandwiches, toasted turkey sandwiches, old turkey sandwiches, and *cold* turkey sandwiches. Together, both on and off camera, Brawley and Holmes are absolutely brilliant, and it was great fun watching them perform like this. Then they would play back the tapes, note down the best lines, and improvise over and over again. This probably accounts for a lot of the film's spontaneity, and that documentary feeling.

In the summer of 1975 Stephen Lack employed the services of a very nice and *very* patient man named Rick Fisher, to construct a leather mask for him. There were endless fittings as it had to be "just perfect" because, after all, Lack's concept was "just brilliant", as I was reminded over and over again.

The following Halloween, it was finally ready, and Lack decided to wear it with a simple navy trenchcoat and go out

trick or treating. I know of at least one glass of wine that was thrown into his face — the mask seemed to have triggered some hostility, and was strangely unnerving. I went out as the bride of Dracula and Pam Holmes went out as Big Bird from Sesame Street but she had lost all of her feathers by the end of the evening.

Since then, Lack's mask has appeared in Italian Vogue, The New York Times, and is put to its best advantage when worn with Lack's white tuxedo.

Rick Fisher, the man who built the mask, has since been putting his talents to full-time use as a commercial artist, with a concentration on record jackets, notably for Toulouse, Boule Noire, and most recently a new group, Minuit.

Spring 1975; I was walking down St. Catherine Street when I did a double take and realized I had just walked past Brawley and Lack. As far as I knew he was in India, and now he was here, on the street, 30 pounds lighter, pale and ashen. We slipped into a restaurant, and I kept saying what's wrong, what's wrong?

Stephen: Oh he's just a little shaky, jet lag, and he's got a *terrible* cold.

He had pneumonia, and had just been busted at the airport. In a classic confession, he had gone through customs, and when asked what was in the suitcase, he replied; "Books, religious books, you know, presents for my friends." The customs man opened the books and out slid 30 pounds of hash. Brawley turned white and said; "Great fucking packing job!"

I had just put myself on the waiting list to be admitted into the Allan Memorial Institute, for, as a spokesman for Mrs. Gerald Ford, the former first lady, put it, "I was not

addicted to any drugs, I was merely trying to overcome a dependence on them"... I adore those press releases, and I have to admit I am in awe of Mrs. Ford's courage, both past and present.

A year later I had survived "rehabilitation", but Brawley was still awaiting sentencing after endless hearings.

March 1976; Early on a Sunday morning, Brawley was rushed to the Royal Victoria after suffering a minor heart attack, and upon his release he completed filming of the **Rubber Gun** – the scene, in fact, where he gets busted in Windsor Station. Then, in the evening, he attended a huge party in his honor, a sort of Birthday-Going-Away-Party, and the following morning, stood trial, and was sentenced. It took three months before my visiting papers came through, and I could see Brawley again. More "plucky dances and faces of adversity".

We did visit often, though, and Tony Roman, fondly known as the little Hitler of Quebec Rock and Roll gave a benefit concert for him, and managed to have a crew of 40-odd light and sound men, all of whom, incidentally, knew Brawley.

Miss Julie Botner, from the fashionable suburb of Hampstead, donated cartons and cartons of fresh fruit. We were piling these cartons into the trunk of Lack's "batmobile" and I kept saying "But Stephen, they'll never let it through, the guards will take a fit"... (anything you bring an inmate has to be cleared in a sort of "Customs" ritual, and food is always discouraged, sometimes prohibited altogether)...

Lack: We'll just say we're from a very rich, very psychotic, and pleasure-oriented part of town... The fruit got through after we agreed it would be raffled off to the inmates, except for a carton of cherries which Lack insisted Brawley *must* have.

Brawley was released from prison on parole a little after a year, although he was just recently refused permission to attend the viewing of **The Rubber Gun** at the Little Carnegie Cinema in New York City, and the subsequent reception at the Canadian Consulate.

Pam Holmes is living out in the Eastern Townships with her daughter Rainbow, one of the delights of **The Rubber Gun**.

Pammy Marchant, recently married to Nik Cohn, who wrote "Rock Dreams" and the article which lead to the film **Saturday Night Fever**, is attending jewelry design school, a long time interest of hers, in New York. Bozo (Allan Moyle) and Stephen Lack are living there as well; they've both been promoting the film, and Lack just opened a one-man show of his paintings and photos in the lobby of Little Carnegie Cinema, concurrent with the opening of **The Rubber Gun**.

Pierre Robert, who was terribly photogenic in his film debut, remains an enigma, although I have heard he would like to pursue a career in films.

Eric Bloch who was the camera man on **Montreal Main** is rumored to have just finished a screenplay of his own, which sounds very promising.

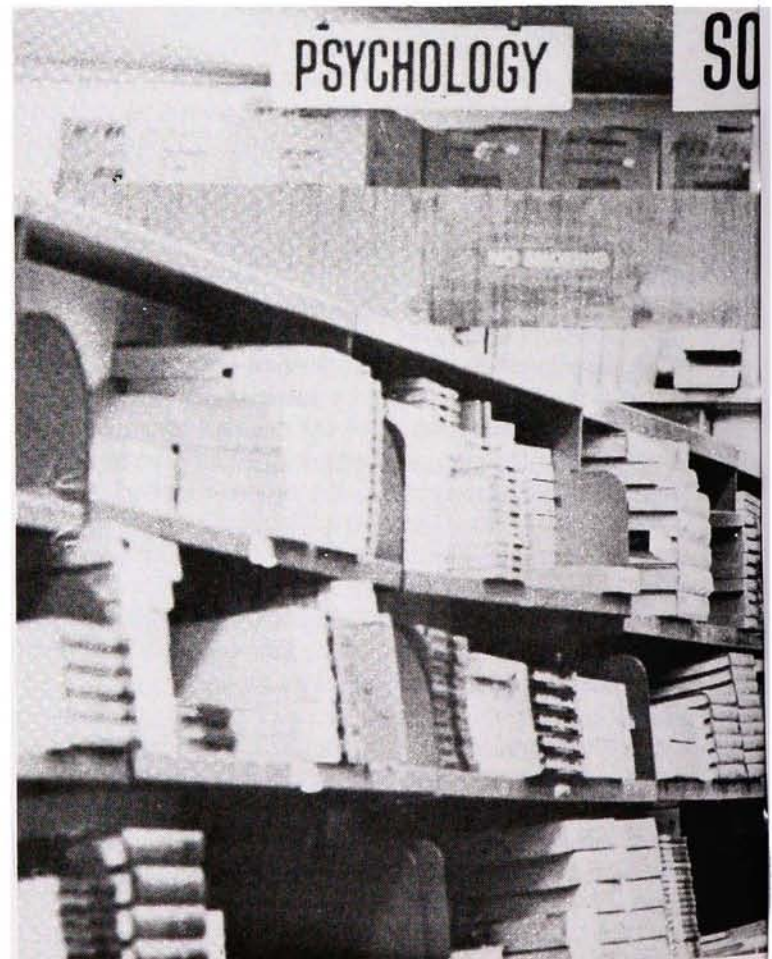
Frank Vitale is married, and living in upper New York State.



photos: P. M. Massé-Conn



Father (Pierre Robert-top) and mother (Pam Holmes) of Rainbow, the only



Steven Lack, or, 'What's a nice boy like you doing in a bookstore like this?'



steal Lack's fire.



In a recent letter from New York, dated March 11th, 1978, Lack writes; "... your package arrived today just after "I Love Lucy" but before "Hollywood Squares", these are the things I know, you understand. There is a talk show with a gushing little evil Bozo-type called Stanley Seigel, who had Kirk Douglas on.

He asked Kirk if he would do him a favor, would he give him a kiss like the one he gave in that great film *The Brotherhood*? Well, Mr. Douglas smiled (one of those famous Actor's Union smiles), and said 'No Stanley, and I'll tell you why, when I did it in the movie I found that I really enjoyed it so much that I had to cut it out.'

Those are just some of the great moments here in New York..." and a lot of other stuff that I can't print.

Earlier that week I had interviewed Brawley and here is part of the transcribed tape;

P.M. ... to what do you think you owe this fatigue?

Brawley: Oh,... just life's sophistication I guess.

P.M. *We were looking through the want ads last week, seeing if there might be a job for you, and you said, frankly, all you wanted to do, was go to Hollywood and get an Oscar. Do you have any comment on that?*

Brawley: I think, considering the people who have won the Academy Award... I mean there have been greats, and there have been near-greats.

P.M. *In what category do you put yourself?*

Brawley: Well, I think, as far as I'm concerned, that as far as my last film is concerned, *The Rubber Gun*, I'm definitely a best supporting actor, I mean let's not kid ourselves, I'm supporting everyone in the film.

P.M. *That's very candid of you to say at this point.*

Brawley: Thank you, Miss P.M.

P.M. *Would you like another scotch, Peter? Is that all right if I call you Peter?*

Brawley: Oh, of course, do call me Peter, but I'm fine with the little drink I have here.

P.M. *What do you like to be called? Peter, Pete, or...*

Brawley: I think I like to be called Peter... or Pete... but I think the day of the facetious nickname is definitely behind us... I think the morality rate of our naiveté has a lot to do with the dispensing of our trivial nicknames... I think it's about time we got a definite assessment, let's call it an assessment of our situation... I think one thing we have to do... let's say the way we address each other... let's take you, I think we'll eventually get around to calling you by your real name instead of P.M., just simply because it's your name.

P.M. *What was the highlight of your evening?*

Brawley: I think we have to stop looking for highlights in the course of our evenings. □

There was a curiously straight screening of the film in New York City on March 29, followed by a reception given by the Canadian Consulate General. (One of the waiters remarked that the guests were eating the centerpiece.) *The Rubber Gun* opened at the Little Carnegie Theatre on April 24, 1978. Ed.